Reaching them a Human Paw: Relational Approaches to Maglemose Companions

Tove Hjørungdal
Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg

Introduction

Something interesting is happening to Mesolithic animals: they are more active than ever. Our colleagues' inspiration from posthumanist approaches is obvious and welcome in this effort. Particularly useful qualities are found in these approaches' ability to embrace more than one subject in concepts of how the world works. This paper mentions some innovative examples, and then focuses on a few Maglemose species, particularly the beaver (*Castor fiber L.*). To specify, the term Maglemose refers to the Early Mesolithic period, ca. 9000–7500 BC. It is eponymous with the Danish bog Maglemose in Zeeland, the location of Mullerup—the first site to be stratigraphically defined as Mesolithic (Sarauw 1903; Holmberg & Hjørungdal 2016). Some roe deer frontal bones from Danish sites are also a source critically evaluated. *Cervinae* are frequent in Mesolithic locales, and have been forerunners in new approaches to animals (Conneller 2004). Maglemose animals have had a long and lifeless tradition as bones from a site: as food remnants and material for tools. Their carefully buried Late Mesolithic canine allies have on the contrary lead a

dynamic life, discussed in terms of the Big Dog (Larsson 1989) and even in shamanic perspectives (Strassburg 2000: 210ff).

This paper finds inspiration in multispecies ethnography, posthumanist and feminist relational directions in all their complexity (e.g. Hird & Roberts 2011; Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; Oma 2018; Overton 2018). How becoming-with is a practice of being worldly is a central concern of feminist approaches, as developed by biologist/philosopher Donna Haraway (2008). I wish to contribute to a discussion on how the world was shaped in the Maglemose, and through what specific intra-actions. The following examples paved my way.

Departure: Budding Subjects of an Early Mesolithic

Maglemose is the name of the Early Stone Age in South Scandinavia. However, its tools and practices are also recognized in large areas of Northern Europe.

Instead of any systematic review of works on animals, or on issues like ontology and totemism respectively, I present a number of works, which are close to my own ideas on life in the Early Mesolithic in general. All of them together have made possible the suggestions and reflections that follow. First, Liv Helga Dommasnes (2006), who problematizes the ontological status of animals in both time and place, and who refers to Haraway's discussions on subjects in social processes. I like to think that the perspective of new animal subjects is found in Dommasnes's idea of writing archaeology from the dog's viewpoint, or as a dog sees it. Unfortunately, she has not elaborated on this wonderful idea.

Next, both Chantal Conneller (2004) and Lynne Bevan (2003) have shed new light on the relationship between red deer and humans at Star Carr. The use of hides and deer skulls with manipulated eye holes is the focus of Conneller's (2004) discussion of 'Becoming Deer'.

Ingrid Fuglestvedt (2018) sees Early Mesolithic animals in totemic terms. She also points to the significance of the seal in Early Holocene coastal Scandinavia, and the notion that humans have followed the seal in their northbound journeys (Fuglestvedt 2012). A similar approach is found in a discussion of swan hunting by Overton and Hamilakis (2013). In a recent paper Nick Overton (2018) enlarges on approaches to human-animal relations. Of special interest are his introduction of terms relating to humans' and animals' different rhythms during day and night and through the year. Overton also demonstrates ways of linking a number of species and their different practices and rhythms of life to archaeological traces and structures. This, however, is where the big challenges are found.

We can find some further support in how to proceed by consulting an earlier work, namely Bryony Coles's (2006) book which includes the Mesolithic beaver. *Beavers in Britain's Past* (Coles 2006) is not framed in the approaches I advocate, but her and John Coles's research offers substantial archaeological knowledge of the beaver. Of special interest is Coles's review of examples of wood material where humans and beavers could have been co-users. More precisely, it is suggested that humans have used beaver-gnawed wood in platform and hut constructions, that humans could have used uninhabited beaver lodges, and that beavers could in turn have used structures initially prepared by and for humans (Coles 2006: 64ff). These scenarios present good examples of how humans and animals may have taken advantage of each other's presence in a waterlogged, woody landscape. Natural sciences have recently been more aware of the beaver as an agent (Willby et al. 2018), as the beaver is among the species returning to Northern Europe (Jørgensen 2017).

These works have all inspired my search for ways of enlivening beavers and other less-visible animals in Danish Maglemose sites.

Revisiting Animal Materialities in Maglemose Sites

Most of the following examples have not played any part in general interpretations of the Scandinavian Maglemose. The reason why may lie in their relative scarceness, or alternatively the materials' fragmentary state of preservation. This is taken as a challenge in expectations of new tracks.

Roe Deer Frontlets with Horns in the Danish Maglemose

At the classic Maglemose site of Mullerup, Georg Sarauw (1903) reported on the bones of humans, as well as 30 different Boreal species, mammals, birds and fish, together with composite tools made of flint with animal bone and antler.

Sarauw classified these materials as belonging to the category of 'The History of Humans and their tools', in contrast to categories concerning the 'History of the Soils, the Animals, and the Plants'. This is an explicit model of an ontological divide between nature and culture, human and animals, as founded on material qualities. In this model, animals and nature are explicit 'others', while humans are active subjects in collaboration with their tools (Sarauw 1903; Holmberg and Hjørungdal 2016).

Returning to the details of the faunal material, it is interesting to note Sarauw's listing of a badger's skull in the inventory, a rare find on which he unfortunately did not make any further reflections. Still more thought provoking is his report on roe deer frontlets with attached horns but lacking eye sockets (*Cervus capreolus*; Sarauw 1903: 196). He did not attribute any functions to these frontlets, and very few scholars have discussed the panels since Sarauw's time. With the support of Danish zoologist Kristian Meyer Gregersen and of Gothenburg osteologist Leif Jonsson, it was recently determined that the Mullerup remains are very fragmented. An additional conclusion is that further osteological analyses might reveal more details about modes of fracture, and possibly bring us closer to suggestions about

functions (Kristian Meyer Gregersen pers. comm. 2018; Leif Johnson pers. comm. 2018). A similar roe deer frontal bone with horns was found at the Maglemose site of Sværdborg Mose (Bille Henriksen 1976: 138f, fig.1).

Panels, different and previous in time, are known from Star Carr, Hochen Viecheln, Mecklenburg (from *Cervus elaphus*; Schuldt 1956: 120), and a few additional sites (e.g. Reinbacher 1956: 147ff; Street 1991). These are from different species, e.g. red deer at Star Carr. According to Martin Street (1991), the antler caps from the Early Mesolithic sites of Hohen Viecheln, Star Carr, Berlin-Biesdorf and Plau were each treated in different manners. Existing perforations were located on the parietal bone (Hohen Viecheln, Star Carr). In most cases, the antlers were shortened (Hohen Viecheln, Plau, and Star Carr). Some panels were thinned (Berlin-Biesdorf, Hohen Viecheln, Plau, Star Carr) or gouged (Berlin-Biesdorf, Star Carr), thus keeping their 'antler-look' whilst losing much of their weight. Street (1991) notes that the horns of the Danish examples (Mullerup and Sværdborg) were shortened (cf. Aaris Sørensen 1976). Any explanation of this way of horn modification is not given by zoologists. That horns were shortened, but not broken off, might well hint at some manner of human intervention. Each of these sets of caps belong to a different tempo-spatial setting and display different means of manipulation. Shortening of the horns however, points to a practice with some continuity, independent of species or geography.

Beavers in Archaeological Sites—Few but Different Traces

Faunal Maglemose materials were examined by the legendary zoologist Herluf Winge in Copenhagen, and we have thus a good record of these bones and dental materials (see Winge in Sarauw 1903; in Friis Johansen 1919; and in Broholm 1924). *Castor* fiber is found at many of the classic sites, among them Mullerup (Sarauw 1903), Sværdborg (Friis Johansen 1919) and Holmegaard (Broholm 1924). The only interpretation of these finds has been by zoologist Tove Hatting, who surveyed the use of beaver mandibles and teeth

for tools, including examples from the sites of Holmegaard and Sværdborg. She found that a certain part of the beaver mandible is often missing. This indicates a more extensive use of beaver jaws as a raw material for tool making (Hatting 1970). Hatting's samples are from the Atlantic chronozone. A closer look at published results on beaver teeth in Sværdborg revealed, however, a rare Boreal example of tool making from beaver teeth (Broholm 1924: 133).

A unique example of Scandinavian Mesolithic beaver lodges comes from Järingsholm in Scania, Sweden. In some ways, these lodges correspond to the Coles' suggestions about species' mutual use of material structures. Namely, in Järingsholm people used materials from old beaver lodges to build their own huts. The excavators documented pieces of worked flint, pieces of beaver-gnawed wood, and a number of entrances to beaver lodges. The stratigraphy showed a layer of collapsed beaver lodges above a sanded beach, and on top of this layer were remnants of cleaned-out fireplaces. These, together with the small amount of flints, led to the conclusion that the site was used intermittently for short visits (Kjällquist 2004; Hjørungdal 2018). The location exemplifies an intersection of beaver and human activities, as well as illustrating different spatio-temporal rhythms across the two species (see Overton 2018). Beaver lodges provided a useful, ready-made material resource, easily accessible to human groups. These may well be the ruined remains of a destructive relationship, with humans driving beavers to leave the area.

A different example of beaver presence is given by Lil Gustafson (1990), who excavated the rock-shelter of Bukkhammeren in Norwegian Trøndelag, a site supposedly occupied during the Mesolithic by beaver-trappers. Coarse Arkose sandstone, used to make net-sinkers utilized in beaver-trapping, was found at the site.

Gustafson (1990) directs our attention to unexpected materials, such as equipment for trapping rather than hunting by arrows. Despite their scarcity, these few examples reveal that beaver materialities across Mesolithic archaeological sites are characterized by diversity.

Discussion: Maglemose Companions

An intra-actor approach broadens our notion of subjects beyond the 'Big Hunter'. The scarce occurrence of human bone at these sites also invites discussions on human visibility in South Scandinavian environs. Human bones were found at Mullerup, deposited all over the site in the same way as animal bones (Sarauw 1903). A few additional finds of human remains are known from bogs and habitation sites. An interesting contrast to the few human bone fragments found in dwelling sites is the bog body of the Koelbjerg woman. She lived 10,000 years ago, and thus earlier than the Maglemose groups. She is so far the first human being known from what is now Denmark, she was found in a bog (a former lake) and was most probably drowned (Bennike and Alexandersen 1997; Bröste and Fischer-Møller 1943). Nevertheless, it is clear that faunal remains from this period far outnumber those of humans.

The Beaver Lodge as a Contact Zone

The Sværdborg area has been characterized by Danish colleagues as a 'beaver biotope' (Aaris Sørensen in Bille Henriksen 1976: 147). However, this area has no beaver lodges, and the Järingsholm case seems therefore unique. Following the idea that beaver lodges were distinct material places within the landscape, we have seen that humans and beavers have used lodges at different times and in different ways. Although beavers are inclined to dwell inside a lodge, this would probably not be possible for humans as the entrance is typically underwater. However, the top of a beaver lodge might have served as a good, dry spot for humans travelling by canoe or on foot through the waterscape. I give this illustration as a means of imagining an example of a bodily way of sharing spaces between species. In terms of the possible relations amongst materialities, rhythm, and practices, I suggest that the beaver lodge was a contact zone, or zone of intra-action. More exactly, the lodge can be regarded as a shared physical life-space of which both humans and beavers had knowledge—in different ways, and on different conditions—of construction and use for different purposes. But human-beaver

relationships are of two kinds. On the one hand, beavers modify environments in many ways, for good and for bad. They cause devastation by their building activities, by building dams and causing floods, and by their extensive gnawing of wood. Humans can also destroy lodges and kill beavers themselves. On the other hand, beavers can produce cut wood in a manner that is also practical for human usage, and build sites, which are useful to humans in search for a dry and firm location in a watery landscape. In a wet landscape, a stay on the top of a beaver lodge for shorter or longer periods is fully possible as well as comfortable.

Another aspect to note is that beaver lodges are very similar in form to what archaeologists have defined as human huts, simply a circular setting with an opening. These similarities further the discussion of the possible material characteristics of inter-species relationships in a physical contact zone. For example, it raises the question of whether humans could have learned something about building huts from beavers. It is agreeable to think about this possibility.

For a broader view on beaver lodges and the mutual use of land- and waterscapes, I am reminded of Lewis Henry Morgan's (1868) *The American Beaver and his Works*. This classic publication gives a distinctly anthropological dimension to the discussion of the beaver as a builder and co-habitant with humans in waterlogged landscapes. Other contributions by early natural scientists include the zoologist Robert Collett (1897). He was a pioneer researcher on the distribution of beavers in Norway—one of the few European regions where the species still survived.

Tool making using beaver teeth, was practiced already in Boreal times (c. 9000–7500 BC). Beaver trapping—in contrast to hunting with arrows—is known from the Bukkhammeren site from Mesolithic times. Both are explicit examples of how beavers have been exploited, methods of slaughter, and of which parts of the animal were then utilised.

Bryony Coles has paved the way through her research in more recent times (discussed above), which has made it possible to make initial suggestions about beaver lodges in relation to human presence/activities. Combined with Haraway's (2008) theoretical work, this perspective can help us to recognize material traits of significance in the definition of contact zones through archaeological finds. Humans and beavers must have been aware of each other in a waterlogged Mesolithic landscape. Overton (2018) comments on the rhythms of humans and beavers and explains how these are distinct to each other; discussing how people and animals can use a locale or specific resource at different times and in different ways, and how people and animals can encounter or avoid each other. Following this conclusion, we can further state that humans can scare, and indeed kill, a beaver. Moreover, a beaver walking and working bipedally can be confused with a human at a distance, and make one wonder if there are unknown people in the vicinity. Phenomena like these were recorded in the 1900s by Norwegian author Mikkjel Fønhus, who spent long periods of time observing both beavers and humans, mostly in inland Norway. This was a survival zone for beavers at a time when most of them were extinguished (Evensberget 2001).

Thoughts on Mutual Becomings

Conneller (2004) greatly advanced the study of human-animal companionship in the Mesolithic. However, there is a further debate regarding the relationship between humans and animals of which archaeologists should be more aware. This debate has been shaped mainly by the philosopher/biologist Donna Haraway, who together with Conneller draws on the writings of Deleuze. Haraway (2008), however, criticises Deleuze for focusing solely on one category of agent. She instead proposes the term 'becoming-with' when discussing human-animal relations. A becoming-with is signified by more than one subject within a social process. Haraway further draws on Jacques Derrida in her emphasis on the 'gaze' between human and animal in the act of becoming-with. The gaze is an integrated aspect of body language between two or more active subjects, for instance the human and the deer. Haraway's expansion aims to

make relational aspects visible and operative in the mutual process of becoming-with each other (Haraway 2008: 19ff). With a reference to Conneller's research on the Star Carr panels, these items were approached as agential. But were they so in the Mullerup context? We can imagine that humans wore the panels in order to approach deer, to avoid scaring them by mimicking their appearance, movements and rhythms. What about questioning the focus on killing and rather think that the milking of them was possible, or letting of blood? Not unlikely, but scientific investigations about traces of milk/blood practices in Maglemose, are lacking.

And what of the links between humans and beavers? There are many, but the issue of the gaze must be approached differently to that of the deer as discussed by Conneller (2004), especially as beavers have very weak sight by daylight. Instead, sound, smell and movement were likely more significant. As to species' different rhythms, their links are integral to an interpretation of human life within the woods and water-lands of the early Mesolithic in South Scandinavia. This was very much home turf for beavers, and humans were, as far as we know, a minority species. Humans and beavers have different rhythms in light and in darkness, and in the changes of the seasons.

These approaches regard animals not only as food or symbols, but as both real and living in the flesh, and with symbolic dimensions in the discursive practices of becoming-with humans and their mutual settings. The notion of becoming-with suggests that species are different from each other, but neither of them needs to be in a permanent supreme position. Ontologies are perceived as flexible.

An approach of becoming-with presupposes more than one subject in social processes. Nor are intra-actions and processes of becoming-with seen as gender or age neutral. A male hunter was not the only human who shared a setting with deer or beavers. It should also be remembered that watery and wooded landscapes themselves play vital roles in the ontological processes that make the world within specific times and places.

In analyses and interpretations of Early Mesolithic environments, we should try to avoid gender as well as human bias; how do we propose to fulfil this? One possibility is to investigate how and where species met in social formations within early Scandinavian prehistory. It is my conviction that a range of relational approaches is the best means of approaching such questions through archaeological material. Besides, I propose that relational approaches have great potential for theorizing between humans and animals, and thus of making analyses and interpretations of discursive practices in the materials shared by humans and their 'others'.

Conclusion: Joining a Relational Approach to Maglemose

A few Maglemose contexts were revisited. The purpose was to connect the archaeological materials, all of them on the margins of established accounts, to aspects of posthumanism together with present-day discussions of animals in archaeology. We can confirm that deer skulls with attached antler seemed important to Maglemose people as well as their predecessors. But the role of the badger's skull as well as of the roe deer frontlets at Danish sites remain unspecified. A few conclusions were made on beaver materials. The beaver hut was posited as a contact zone combining knowledge about species' different rhythms of life. South Scandinavia was peopled with water, growing woodland, animals and a few human beings. It is far from unrealistic to imagine human presence as sporadic, possibly 'the other' in this Maglemose setting. Humans are anyway the rational species, in charge of reaching out to animal co-habitants as well as sometimes extinguishing them. Scholars in turn are in charge of choosing an approach favourable to producing new knowledge about well-known materials. Concepts of rhythm, practices, and materiality in human-animal shared landscapes give archaeologists the substance to form a relational approach. Although by a limited example, my wish has been to emphasize that this approach has the potential of encouraging our ongoing search for co-acting species. It

also inspires alternatives to gender- and human-biased approaches to Maglemose environments, certainly of a multiple constitution.

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